

Be Free

Management of complex and exponentially growing support requirements

CORPORATE PROFILE Leader in online performance marketing services

BUSINESS CHALLENGE Effectively manage overwhelming volume of inquiries

SOLUTION KANA IQ integrated with in-house CRM

RESULTS 60% of inquiries handled via Internet the first week, reducing staff load and providing superior service

Be Free's affiliate support associates were overloaded with inquiries from the millions of affiliates who have partnered with Be Free's 360+ affiliate marketing customers. Be Free needed an intelligent and proven solution to provide customized, online customer support to complement its support team. An online help service would empower both Be Free customers and their affiliate partners to help themselves to quick solutions to basic challenges and to get fast responses via the Internet.

KANA IQ provided the tools to create an accurate, useful store of frequently sought information for Be Free's performance marketing customers, as well as separate knowledge bases for each Be Free outsourcing customer. 60 percent of Be Free support issues were handled via the Internet in the first week of deployment. Be Free's affiliate support staff spends time more efficiently on the more complicated inquiries and affiliates are able to attain fast, consistent answers to basic questions more quickly and easily. Be Free was able to provide a higher level of service more effectively, and without increasing staff.

Leadership in Performance Marketing Creates Massive Support Requirements

Be Free, Inc. is the leader in performance marketing—building and managing branded online sales channels for successful e-merchants, Internet portals and content sites. Be Free's programs help these e-businesses to increase sales, drive traffic, generate leads and extend brand reach, while paying only for the performance of their promotions. Be Free's highly successful performance marketing programs have garnered an impressive customer list of more than 350 industry leaders, including America Online, barnesandnoble.com, Yahoo, Geocities, Garden.com, Lycos, IBM and TIME, Inc.

As a pioneer in affiliate programs and the leader in performance marketing, Be Free was growing its customer-base rapidly, and exponentially growing the number of affiliate relationships supported through Be Free powered affiliate programs. This growth and success presented a powerful service challenge: in addition to the general support needed by customers to efficiently and strategically manage an affiliate program, many of Be Free's performance marketing customers depended upon Be Free to provide seamless support to their affiliate partners as well. Be Free needed to create an online knowledge base to complement its talented affiliate support associates and provide an effective and high-quality 24/7 support experience for its affiliate partners.

After researching available products, Be Free found that solutions from KANA Software Inc. would enable them to develop a strong and proactive eService strategy while allowing the extensive customization they needed. Using KANA IQ, Be Free was able to create detailed knowledge bases for each Be Free powered affiliate program member, essentially empowering the affiliates to serve themselves when and as they wished. Be Free also saw dramatic improvements in its service staff efficiency, with clear benefits for its own bottom line.

Highly Customized Stores of Knowledge Support a Wide Range of Customers via Self-Service on the Internet

“About 60% of Be Free’s performance marketing customers asked us to develop merchant-branded affiliate knowledge bases,” said Paul Ringuette, Be Free’s Director of Service Development. “The end-solution needed to be easy-to-use and intuitive, both from the user’s and the developer’s perspective. We needed to learn how to create hundreds of these knowledge bases for our performance marketing customers, each one unique. We also needed a basis for our affiliates to do the same for their customers, each one again unique. So we needed a tool to replicate this support environment repeatedly for every one of these knowledge bases.”

KANA IQ allowed Be Free to create, deploy and maintain knowledge bases to yield consistent, accurate responses to a wide variety of inquiries—from answers to technical questions to information about compensation structures and program guidelines. Moreover, KANA IQ allow customers to interact with a site in the most appropriate way, either through web self-service or through email interaction with affiliate support representatives. Having these options has been especially gratifying to the increasing numbers of affiliates who want the time savings and convenience of self-service. This empowering technology gives affiliates access to high quality, timely information with the assurance that they can easily switch to human interaction when required.

Service Staff Efficiency Improves as Affiliates Find Answers on the Web.

Before implementing the KANA solution, email inquiries to the Be Free affiliate support staff were increasing exponentially. Ringuette recalls that call volume increased from 7,500 emails in one month to over 13,000 only two months later. “The email volume was overwhelming our affiliate services group,” said Ringuette. “Not only was this stressful for our staff, but we have service-level agreements with our customers that we needed to meet.” Now, with KANA IQ providing 50% to 60% call deflection, the workload is easily managed, and service quality is at its highest. Be Free is now repositioning its affiliate support staff to service affiliate inquires at a higher level, providing value and benefit for Be Free’s performance marketing customers, their affiliate partners, and Be Free.

According to Ringuette, Be Free had held three primary expectations by which the success of the project would be measured: quick implementation to relieve the incredible stress on the affiliate services group; building of the merchant knowledge base; and integration with Be Free’s own customer resource management (CRM) system. KANA IQ met or exceeded all of their expectations, and much faster than they had envisioned. “Overall, the implementation was a tremendous success, and it was executed over a very short eight-week period,” said Ringuette.

Be Free had originally faced a challenge of gargantuan proportions. Now, Be Free’s solution has helped to ensure the company’s recognized leadership in its field, and KANA IQ was key. “The search for an answer to the knowledge base issue kept me awake at night for months,” said Ringuette. “Before finding our solution, I searched the market for an answer for months, and nearly concluded it didn’t exist. This technology is alone in its class. And now, as it turns out, it’s been the best of all possible solutions.”